

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN BUSINESS- TO-BUSINESS (B2B) INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Bachelor's Thesis
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Abstract

The era of globalization today has led to the expansion and integration of different economies. The integration of economies exposes the businesses within the economies to a universal cultural marketing mix. Competition among businesses in the international market has led to an increase in market research, which enhances and maintains the relevance of the businesses in their target market. The importance of cultural diversity is on the increase, thanks to the growth of new and advanced technologies that enable marketers to reach wide consumers and clientele beyond the geographical boundaries. The new technologies and marketing communication channels have raised the importance of the studies on cultural business diversities. Different countries have different ways of expressing culture. This can expose businesses to offend people from different cultures when they market their brands in the international markets. Businesses need to be aware of that the cultural patterns in different economies affect the promotion and marketing of their products. The choices of consumers across different economies depend on cultural values, traditions and the customs of the specific region.

This research focuses on the impact of the differences of culture in business-to-business (B2B) integrated marketing communication channels. The thesis will also define thoroughly B2B markets and integrated marketing communication channels. The theoretical framework of the study will be based on social exchange theory (SET) and commitment-trust theory. This paper will identify and analyze the impacts of culture on the promotion and marketing strategies of products and services by companies in the global market. The contribution of this research is achieved by providing emphasis on how diversified cultures have affected the B2B marketing strategies.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Culture describes and dictates the attributes, character traits, and way of lifestyle of a specific group of people. According to Yoo and Donthu (1998, 179), culture is what people are and includes the totality of peoples' lifestyles and personality. Culture includes the way a specific group of people dress, speak, their attitudes, their values and beliefs, their learning and their norms. Important factors that affect the integrated marketing communication channels of companies are budget, target market competition, and the nature of the economy. Today, however, culture has a heavy impact on the preferences of consumers, which was not a consideration of businesses years ago.

The integrated communication channels are aimed at creating awareness to the consumers about the features and characteristics of the products. Furthermore, the communication channels used by a company are aimed at influencing the target market to purchase the products or subscribe to their services. The communication channels employed by a business depict the maintenance of product quality and control of the costs. Culture has a great impact on the behavior and beliefs of people and indirectly, it has an effect on the integrated marketing communication channels. An analysis of the culture of the local economy is important for a company before introducing a product into the economy or advertising a product (Hofstede 2016, 47).

The target market will only be attracted to a product or service when they conform to the norms, traditions, norms and the cultural values of the consumers. Whenever the integrated marketing communication channels fail to express the cultural standards of the target market, they are in risk of failing to gain the attention of the target market, which would make them incur huge costs, which implies to grievous losses. The local companies and traders take automatically into consideration the cultural values of the market while being at their homefront. Therefore, for an international company, studying the cultural standards of the target market is necessary for the integrated marketing channels to be productive (Sojka & Tansuhaj 1995, 461). This way, international companies can get at least closer or even to a same level as local businesses in terms of cultural knowledge.

Globalization and digitalization in the business environments have led to an increase in the occurrence, hastiness, and a number of the competing businesses (Cleveland et al.

2013, 959). For a start-up company or a company that is keen on expanding its business operations, the implementation of the right marketing communication channels is critical in ensuring its survival in the market. Customers are faced with different product alternatives that satisfy the same need. The business environment today is customer tailored due to the availability of so many alternatives in the market. Businesses look towards satisfying the needs of the customers by offering high quality, making the products easily accessible to the customers and selling the products at relatively low prices. These widely acknowledged marketing concepts are considered by most of the promotional strategies developed by companies. However, only businesses that stay in a specific market for a long time implement culture as a factor in their growth strategies inside that economy.

Competition in the international market has necessitated increased market research to enable companies to remain relevant in their target market (Clark 1990, 66). Because of this, there is a growing need for businesses to concentrate on product development, quality of the product and differentiation from the other substitutes in the market. In addition, companies that integrate the cultural values of the target market in their communication channels tend to grab the attention of the target market (Hofstede 2016, 57).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As introduced already, more companies and businesses are entering the global market because of the digitalization, and this leads to growing interest in cultural differences in order to gain bigger profits. Culture has a direct impact on international marketing communication strategies because different people in different regions have a different perception of things. In order to succeed as a brand promoter or marketer, there is a need to study the local culture in-depth before offering or introducing any product to that local market. Effective communication for international marketers are the messages that conform to the receiver's culture, customs and learning process. It is human nature that, everyone judges products introduced into the market based on cultural measurement (Parker and Dawar 1994, 82). Meaning that cultural components affect on people's viewpoints and different things bring out different meanings in different cultures. For example, a thumb carries the signal of 'everything is okay' in the western culture, but to other cultures such as the Bengali people in South Asia, the thumb has a negative meaning. The cultural differences between different sets of economies force a brand promoter or marketer in the international market to

coordinate the communication channels in ways that align with the culture of the target market.

Customers in different economies and countries have different preferences and choices. The differences in preferences are the outcomes of the diversification in norms, beliefs, attitudes and cultural values of the people. Culture has the power of shaping and influencing the image of products, the lifestyle, and motivation towards a specific product for the customers. Cross-border businesses and trading are on the increase due to the globalization in today's world, which have led the growth and development of global markets (Clark 1990, 70). Businesses that have moved towards cross-border trading and international marketing, face the challenges of difference in the markets. In more detail, there are challenges in designing and developing products and integrated communication channels that coordinate with the diversified cultures. The businesses that become successful are those that design products that satisfy the specific cultural demands of the target market (Parker and Dawar 1994, 86). Different values and features of the same product can be highlighted in different markets. For example, understanding the vitality of traditional Asian values, the Ritz-Carlton hotel advertisements in Asia emphasize respect for tradition and wisdom even as the hotel embraces the future (Schmitt and Simson, 1998, p. 261). Thus, companies that use integrated communication channels that develop marketing and promotional strategies in line with the cultures of an economy are more likely to overcome the challenge of exploring global markets.

1.3 Objectives and Aim of the research

The main aim of this study is to determine the impact of cultural differences in business-to-business integrated marketing communication channels. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of cultural differences in business-to-business marketing communication channels. The thesis will compare different marketing strategies, actions, and channels in the framework of cultural differences. Secondary objectives of this thesis are:

1. To investigate the how differences in culture affect the suitability of the marketing strategies and actions.
2. To understand the unique features of B2B integrated marketing communication channels and their cultural relevance

3. To understand the B2B markets within SET and commitment and trust theory framework

1.4 Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the cultural differences influence most suitable marketing actions?
2. Which marketing channels are culturally relevant?
3. What is the overall impact of cultural differences in the B2B market?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Two different theories concerning seller-buyer relationships are introduced to help the reader to understand the mechanisms behind the relationship marketing and use of integrated marketing communication channels in international B2B markets.

1.5.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) is rooted in sociology, economics and psychology. As a marketing theory it has been used in relationship marketing subsequently from the 1970s. SET applies in the evaluation of relationships between sellers and buyers and also to the exchange of two parties. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, 870), social exchange theory is the most influential and authoritative conceptual prototype in the organizational marketing behavior. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, 874) pronounced that there are six various resources that interpersonal adherences to the social exchange theory, which are information, goods, services, status, love, and money. The two organizational scientists added that SET has the potential and likelihood to provide a framework that unites a great deal of the organizational behaviors (ibid, 875).

However, Young-Ybarra and Wiersema (1999, 441) articulated that SET has the potential to reduce the interactions of humans to a rational process that originates from economic theory. Drawbacks also include that according to (Miller 2005) the SET theory questionably presumes the quality of objectives of a relationship is reciprocity and intimacy. He also proposed that SET is based on a specific person's mindset, which hinders the description, and application of corporate cultures.

1.5.2 Commitment-Trust Theory

Commitment trust theory is the second approach to analyzing the relationship. This theory emphasizes on two factors, trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994, 21), that are necessary for any relationship to be successful. According to Geyskens, (1996, 304), relationship marketing is distinguished by describing and differentiating relational, effective and productive exchanges from ineffective and unproductive exchanges. Sherman argued that commitment and trust are critical to successful marketing relationships. According to Assael (1987, 664), commitment and trust in any relationship marketing are crucial in that they recommend marketers and promoters to work at maintaining and upholding relationships by cooperating with the relations and marketing partners. Instead of going after short term profits, the marketers structure the strategies in such a way that they follow the principles that will ensure long lasting bonds are created and as a result, the customers will trust such businesses because there is mutual loyalty that assists both parties to fulfill their needs. Moreover, they help them to consider high-risk activities as being necessary because of the impression and feeling that their relationship partners will not take the opportunity to betray them.

The theory of commitment and trust is the reason for the existence of marketing partner behaviors that are in cooperation with each other, which in turn leads to a successful marketing relationship. Morgan and Hunt (1994, 22) articulated that commitment and trust are the most critical intercessors between relationship partners and essential for establishing a relationship that is cooperative among the partners.

According to Williams et al. (1998, 273), different countries and economies have varying drivers of commitment and trust relationships. They ascertained that the degree of collectivism and individuality in any country is the key determinant for social bonding among the people. They observed that collectivism (social orientation countries) would be extremely reactive to the structural concepts of relationships in business, and would emphasize more on social bonding. They also found out that individuality (structural orientation countries) would be more reactive to the structural concepts of relationships in business and would emphasize on the structural bonding more than the social bonding aspects. The table below shows the differences between the social exchange approach and the commitment and trust approach to relationships.

Table 1: Differences between Social Exchange Theory and Commitment and Trust Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Commitment and Trust Theory
SET has its origin from sociology, psychology, and economics	This theory has an origin in behavioral marketing and psychology.
Social behavior is not only an exchange of material goods and services but also the exchange of non-material goods and services like prestige or approval.	Refers to actions directed towards creation, establishment, development and maintenance of successful relations
Explains social stability and change as a process of managed and negotiated exchanges between relationship parties	Explains the formation of permanent relationships through the variables of trust and commitment
Contends that human relationships are subject to rational exchange and mutual benefits	Contends that marketing relationship requires and necessitates trust and commitment from the parties
SET is connected to structuralism and rational alternative theories and highlights many of the major presumptions of these two theories.	The commitment and trust theory is connected to marketing theory
Whether or not trust and commitment emanate between the partners in exchange, in a relationship exchange, the parties expect the perceived rewards or costs at a later date	Commitment and trust are seen as critical interceding variables of successful marketing and flourishing relationships

These two theories were chosen to thesis because they represent B2B atmosphere with relationships perspective pretty well. I'm going to examine cultural aspects in the B2B integrated communication channels through these two theories.

2. Business to Business Marketing

2.1 Definition of B2B Marketing

According to Anderson and Narus (1998, 54), business-to-business markets include institutions, businesses, firms and governments deal with the acquisition of goods and

services for their individual use. They added that these institutions, businesses, firms, and governments acquire the products for either to develop and incorporate them into the goods and services they create or to have them resold along with the goods and services they develop. Kumar and Reinartz (2012, 261) argued that B2B marketing is a form of relationship marketing where a company on the supplier side relates to another company on the consumer side. They noted that a consumer company could be a sole trader, institution or company.

The market for products sold and purchased between firms is larger than the market for products in the consumer market. The business markets, as opposed to the consumer market, constitute of organizations of many sizes and types. The nature of the relationships between organizations varies in the duration and significance with one another. Longer relationships are more important than in B2C since trust and commitment need more time to develop. While these organizations and firms are usually systematically, structurally and legally independent, they have a mutual and interdependence relationship with each other. The interdependence means that the institutions, firms, and government have to work with other institutions in order for each of them to achieve their objectives (Wiersema 2013, 471).

2.2 Features of B2B Markets

McCort and Malhotra (1993, 99) noted that there are features that characterize the business markets including (1) the buying processes of the organizations, (2) the international proportions and attributes, (3) the nature of demand, and (4) the development of relationships between the institutions in the process of selling and purchasing.

2.2.1 The Processes of Buying

The potential and possible risks in the B2B market is relatively high, which necessitates for marketing decisions to involve many people and take a longer duration. The processes are different from consumer markets where customers develop and make decisions quickly since the risk in the markets is low (Wiersema 2013, 476). Businesses take a long time to understand each other due to the form and nature of the business interactions. Companies and firms selling to the B2B markets sacrifice a lot of time to understand the specific needs of the customer firm and their customer's customers. The process of buying in

business markets is a group activity. The size, nature and composition of the group change according to the importance and significance of the products bought.

2.2.2 International Proportions and Attributes

Businesses operating in the business markets are progressively pursuing the global markets. The digitalization and advancement of communication channels, especially the internet, has enhanced businesses to conduct businesses outside the borders of the economy they operate. In contrast with the B2C markets, global businesses in the B2B markets are relatively softer. In B2B markets, the only worry is the culture of the target market. However, in consumer markets, there are varieties of issues and challenges that pertain to marketers, which include the value held by the consumers, culture, the marketing channels and promotional activities utilized. In the consumer markets, marketers have to put in mind the style, ingredients, colors, packaging and buying processes of the customers in the target market on the international arena. Business markets, on the other hand, gains from the low variety in the functionality and performance of the products. The underlying nature of the products traded in the international markets creates the benefits of B2B businesses. The global business markets work hand in hand to regulate and determine the environment of conducting business (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca 2013, 297).

2.2.3 Nature of Demand

The nature and type of demand in the B2B markets is critical to organizations. The facets that relate to the demand of products in the business markets are (1) variance of demand (2) elasticity of demand and (3) the derivation of demand. The demand for goods and services is derived in the business markets. The institutions, firms, and organizations who are customers in the business markets are responsible for the demand derived. For instance, the demand of Airbus aircraft is derived from the demand of flights of the Airline company that uses the aircraft. The determination is through the number of flights it makes, and the amount that the customers are prepared and ready to pay. Nevertheless, each airbus aircraft is the outcome and consequential product of the firms that relate to each other.

There is a variability of demand in the B2B markets. Since the demand in the business markets is derived, the fluctuations and variations originate from the changes in customer behavior and preferences (Wiersema 2013, 481). Organizations operating in the business markets should monitor predict and anticipate demands from the emergence of business and

economic cycles. For instance, the Airbus company and anticipate a fall in demand such in the case of the September 2001 air attacks in the United States. The attack had a resultant effect on the aircraft business, which indirectly affected other organizations operating in the business markets such as the manufacturers of aircraft, support services, and subcontractors.

Moreover, there is inelasticity of demand in the business markets. For instance, if a company has been developing a product that differentiates into its procedures and processes, uncontrollable and unpredictable increase in prices by their suppliers would have to be absorbed. The absorption of the increased price will last until a redesigned or a revised product is created and developed, which would extinguish the original parts. This can be incredibly time-consuming and in some cases even impossible. Brassington and Pettitt (2003, 13) pronounced that the inelasticity of prices and low sensitivity to demand of products is because the suppliers and manufacturers are ordinarily reluctant to fail their consumers due to a failed or delayed supply.

2.2.4 Development of Relationships

Compared business to consumer relationships, which are considered in the past as relatively unimportant and weak, the B2B relationships are crucial. Today, organizations have recognized the importance of developing and maintaining these relationships. However, the nature of the products, the competitive factors, the perceived value of the products to the customers and the derived demand have made relationships in the B2B markets costly and challenging to develop and maintain.

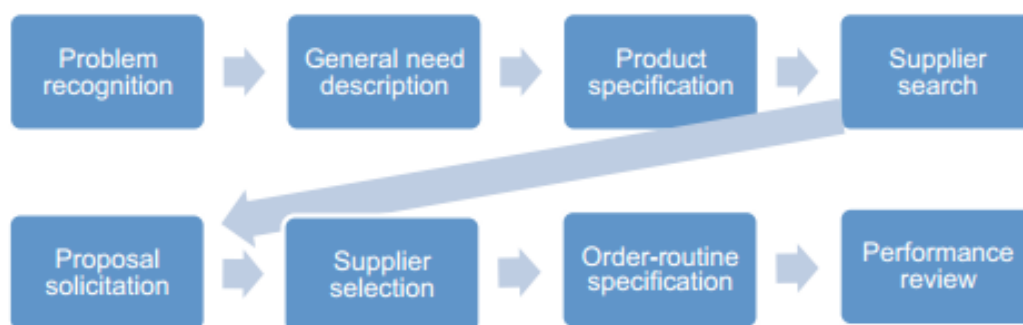
The success of organizations trading in the business markets is dependent on the establishment and maintenance of positive relations between the purchasing and selling firms. Morgan and Hunt (1994, 10) articulated that the partnership and coordination of the organizations over the development of the products are the key features of business marketing. The two marketing theorists added that the importance and significance of marketing relationships are to develop, establish and sustain profitable exchanges with the customers. This reflects pretty accurately with Social Exchange Theory, which says that all human relationships are subject to cost benefit analysis and other alternatives' comparison. Passive consumer and the active seller establish and develop relationships in B2B markets. The in-depth understanding and analysis of relationships in the B2B markets are critical to the growth of business between the two parties. In business markets, the initiation and maintenance of active relationships are the responsibility of both the buyer and the seller.

Again, commitment and trust are seen as the important factors for maintaining the relationship at certain level. Both the sellers and buyers have the capacity to determine the direct or indirect development of the relationships and both of them have to benefit from the relationship for it to be long-lasting (SET).

2.3 Buying Situations in Business Markets

Products bought by organizations, firms, and government institutions are different from the products bought by individual consumers. Some of the products purchased in the business markets are normal while others necessitate a lot of thinking and decision making before purchasing them (Kotler 2009, 197). The process of buying in the business-to-business markets includes a number of stages as compared to the consumer markets. All the phases incurred by organizational and business buyers are met when deliberating on a new product, but once the product is bought and adopted by the firm, some of the phases are skipped. Figure 1 below illustrates the steps deliberated by business buyers before they can purchase a product (Kotler 2009, 202). The process is much more complex and sophisticated, but the basic steps are highlighted below.

Figure 1: Stages of the organizational buying process as adopted by Kotler (2009, 202)



2.4 Comparison between Business (B2B) and Consumer Markets (B2C)

According to Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013, 299), business and consumer marketing are similar in two broad ways; (1) both marketing strategies have consumer preference and orientation. They all seek to understand the varying needs and understanding of the consumer

needs. (2) Both consumer and business marketing need to have the ability to develop strategies that collect and gather market information about their competing firms and about their target consumers. Moore et al. (2013, 49) note that the customers in both consumer and business markets are humans and must be treated and handled in a similar manner.

The marketing of goods in the business and consumer markets differ in various ways. While business marketing does not involve complex fundamentals in marketing products to their consumers, consumer markets have to implement a number of differentials to grab the attention of their target customers (Lindgreen & Wynstra 2005, 12). The business and consumer marketing vary in the nature of marketing strategies and communication channels used. In addition, consumer marketing embraces traditional thinking in the culture of the consumers while business marketing is based conceptually on the modern communication channels. The following table summarizes the key differences between consumer markets and business markets.

Table 2: The main differences between business and consumer marketing

Key characteristics	Consumer Markets	Business markets
Purchase orientation to satisfy	Individual or family needs	Organizational needs
Number of decision makers	Small	Large
Length of decision time	Short and simple	Long and complex
Size of purchase	Small quantities	Large in value and volume
Consequence of poor purchase	Limited	Potentially critical
Nature of product/service	Standard range of products	Customized packages
Channel configuration	Complex and long	Simple and short
Promotion focus	Psychological benefits	Economic/utilitarian benefits
Primary promotional tool	Advertising	Personal selling
Supplier switching costs	Limited	Large

2.5 Value Creation in the B2B Market

2.5.1 Importance of value creation

According to Ballantyne and Aitken (2007, 368), there is a perception of creation, development, and delivery of value in business markets. Ballantyne and Aitken are in the belief that in order to understand and realize the business markets, the marketers have to take

into consideration the process of creating value. Horvath (2001, 206) argued that the major difference between a business relationship and a consumer relationship is the fashion in which the consumers are given value. Customers are given more value in business markets than in consumer markets because the business markets are based on collaborative relationships, unlike the consumer markets which are more often based on transactional relationships. It could be argued if this is entirely true, but in any case, the degree of trust and commitment is greater in B2B relationship than it is in B2C context. Commitment and trust are often attached to the creation of customer value. The difference between a collaborative relationship and a transactional relationship is the solution given to the customers' needs. In consumer markets the solution offered to the customers is a physical core product or service. On the other hand, in business markets, which are governed by collaborative relationships, the solution offered to the needs of the consumers is the marketing relationship itself.

According to a study conducted by Johnston and Kong (2011, 6), eighty percent of executives in an organization had a sense that their companies provided a superordinate customer experience to their customers. On the other hand, only eight percent of the customers served by those companies agreed to have received a better customer experience. This example demonstrates a familiar challenge in the creation of value. The perceived value created in marketing relationships matters in the effectiveness and duration of the relationships (ibid, 8). Johnson and Kong (2011, 9) also argued that a successful and flourishing consumer experience creates and provides the perceived value by the customers. When the executives and employees of an organization get a clear understanding of the impact of a better consumer experience, they get more committed to the work and achieve job satisfaction in the end. Horvath (2001, 207) believes that communication between the customers and the buyers is what leads to the development and creation of value in the marketing relationships. He adds that in order for a company to create value in any marketing relationship, communication needs to be effectively and efficiently managed.

When an organization focuses its energy on the creation of value, the planned interactions and communications are directed in a way, which leads to improvement in the overall customer experience. According to Horvath (2001, 205), to achieve overall organizational success in marketing, an organization must not only know its consumers, but also develop strategies to accomplish the expected outcomes.

2.5.2 Customer Value in B2B Marketing

Woodruff (1997) defines customer value as: “a customer perceived preference for and evaluation of those products attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer’s goals and purposes in use situations”. Moreover, in business markets, the creation of customer value is achieved by organizations in understanding two broad concepts of customer value; (1) value of offerings and (2) value of the business relationships (Lindgreen and Wynstra 2005, 10). The value of offerings aspects is emphasizing the tangible facets of the customer value. The tangible physical aspects of customer include the functionality and practical usability of the product offered. The value of business relationships focuses on the intangible facets of consumer value such as the knowledge, skills, and reputation.

I. Value of Offerings

According to Lindgreen and Wynstra (2005, 13), the customer value is created and developed by the addition of extra features to the product. The extra features include financing, support services and flexible delivery of the products to the consumers. The extra characteristics of the product are fractioned into five major levels; expected, core, potential, augmented and final product characteristics. According to Payne and Holt (2001, 159), the augmented feature level lays an emphasis on the inherent value of a product. Lindgreen and Wynstra (2005, 17) articulate that the customer value of a product is an aggregate of three components; (1) perceived benefits of the product (2) cost of ownership of the product and (3) the price of the product. Doyle (2000, 299) noted that the customer value is a summation of the perceived benefit of the product minus the cost of ownership and minus the price of the product. According to Doyle (ibid), the perceived benefit of the product incorporates the quality and performance of the product offered; the cost of ownership includes the expenses incurred by the organization in owning the product, and the price of the product as its purchasing price. The customer value is also inclusive of all other costs incurred by the business after the customer buys the product such as training of personnel, installation costs, costs of maintaining the product as well as the psychological uncertainty and risks of interchanging vendors. The customer value from marketing relationships is comprehended as the aggregate between gains (benefits), product price and costs (Kotler 2009, 18).

II. Value of Business Relationships

Morgan and Hunt (1994, 36) argue that the perception of consumer value is implanted in the marketing relationships. The customer value has its roots in relationship marketing. In

this facet of customer value, relationship-based customer exchanges (B2B relationships) are of more value to the customer in the end than transaction-based customer exchanges (B2C relationships). From this, it is arguable that customer value is closely associated with both used theories, SET and Commitment and trust theory. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, 38), the customer relationships are conceived to have value for both sellers and buyers and the synergies benefit both the partners and the stakeholders of the organization. This also the key aspect in Social exchange theory. The value of marketing relationships is central to the organizations and their customers. It could be claimed that the longer a relationship is maintained in the business markets, the more there is a creation of the value of both the organization and its customers.

2.6 Integrated Marketing Communications in B2B Market

2.6.1 Definitions

Over the years, mass media advertising prevailed the promotional marketing function in most organizations. Most organizations relied principally on the advertising and promotional agencies for advice and direction in marketing communications. The marketing function utilized additional marketing and promotional communication tools, but marketing agencies were considered subsidiary services (Groom & Fritz 2008, 4). The integrated marketing communications are defined in the strategic analysis, implementation, choice, and control of all the features of communications in marketing, which economically, efficiently and effectively influence transactions between a business and its potential and existing clients and customers (Holm 2006, 23). Many promoters and marketers build strong barriers around the numerous promotional and marketing functions and manage them separately. In most organizations, marketing, and promotional function is assigned a separate budget, separate goals, objectives, and separate views of the market.

According to Groom and Fritz (2008, 4), Integrated Marketing Communications were established in the 1980s when organizations began to take a broad perspective of promotional and marketing communication. It is in this period that companies saw the need for strategic integration of their marketing and promotional tools. The main objective of integrated marketing communication strategies is to understand, communicate and convey information that is expected by the clients. Thus, the organizations' marketing function has to understand the decision-making the process of the existing or potential client. Holm (2006, 24) noted that

the messages communicated should be based on what the customer or client wants to hear, and not what the organization wants to say. According to Kotler and Keller (2012, 495), the process of planning is designed and developed to assure that all the brand contacts obtained by a client or product prospect are relevant and consistent with that person over time.

2.6.2 Communication channels in B2B Marketing Organizations

According to Kotler (2012, 35), marketing and promotional communications can be conveyed in various ways which range from non-personal advertising to personalized advertising channels. The non-personal communication channels include radio, TV, newspapers and magazines while the personal communication tools include direct mail, catalogs, telemarketing and door-to-door visits. The communication channels as discussed by Kotler (ibid) include: advertising, interactive and direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, events and experiences and Word of Mouth Marketing.

Advertising is a form of a non-personal communication channel, which is paid for by an advertising agency. Advertising can be done on radio, TV, billboards, internet commercials, or print media such as magazines and newspapers (Kale 1991, 6). The most effective form of advertising in business-to-business marketing strategies is persuasion, informing, education, reinforcement, and selling. The most effective advertising communication channel in industrial organizations are contextual advertising and print magazines. Contextual advertising is online and mobile promotional and marketing that targets promotions based on user data and information such as search browsing activity. The objective of advertising is to present products to clients in which they are already interested (Kotler 2012, 36)

Interactive marketing includes all programs and activities developed to engage clients directly or indirectly (Kale 1991, 7). Improve image, raise awareness or boost sales of products. On the other hand, direct marketing involves personal communication messages such as telecommunications and direct emails. In direct marketing, telephone, emails, fax or internet is used to convey messages directly to the specific customers to construct a dialogue or response (Danaher & Rossiter 2011, 11). The most economical and efficient direct marketing strategies are catalogs, websites, blogs, telemarketing and direct mail. In both interactive and direct marketing strategies, the more personal the content or message is, the better it works on clients. Compared to advertising, direct and interactive marketing is expensive but the effective strategy in business markets (Kotler 2012, 36).

Sales promotion adopts various short-term incentives that are used by marketers to promote and encourage purchase or trial of a product (Danaher & Rossiter 2011, 12). The incentives include sampling, test-driving, and consumer promotions. Sales promotional strategy is effective for marketers introducing a new product to the market, attracting potential clients, maintenance of sales in off low seasons and enhancing personal selling. The effective tools used in sales promotion include demonstrations, training programs and low-interest financing for expensive products. The marketing function evaluates sales promotional events as productive, and high attendance is rated highly in the development of awareness of a new product.

Public relations incorporate various strategies that are directed internally to the staff of a company or externally to clients, government, media, firms and other consumers to protect and promote the image of the organization (Kotler 2012, 36). In addition, the public relations programs improve the communications of the individual products. Public relations examples include interviews, feature articles, press conferences, special events and news releases. In business marketing, public relations include the validation from third parties. Therefore, for marketers in organizations dealing with business marketing, development of a good relationship with journalists can be a very promising communication tool. The communication of an organization's story through captivating media is an effective marketing tool.

Personal selling is involved with face-to-face communicational programs that persuade and convince a target group of people to take necessary and appropriate actions (Kotler 2012, 37). Personal selling is the most expensive, most popular and most effective communication channel in B2B markets. Various tools of personal selling include trade exhibitions and shows, sales meetings, and sales presentations. Trade shows are the most effective personal selling communication tools since they generate and develop the most and best leads. Most organizations in the business markets believe that phone calls are the most effective and economical sources of lead (Williams 1998, 275). It is argued that phone calls are opportunities of finding out information about the consumers and their process of decision-making. On the other hand, phone calls can also have negative side effects, like distrust, loss of control and vulnerability towards the company (Mohr and Nevin 1990; Fournier, Dobscha and Mick 1998). But all in all, phone calls are without a doubt a very powerful tool in personal selling.

Events and experiences are programs and activities sponsored by an organization to develop and establish brand related interactions with the clients (Kotler 2012, 36). The activities include entertainment, sports, and arts that are informal. The advantages of events and experiences are that the interesting programs can be communicated and promoted in the mainstream media while at the same time, the image and reputation of the company develop. Apart from being costly, the setback with this communication tool is that it is impossible to measure the outcome and results of the events (Rosenbloom & Trina 2003, 311). For small business-to-business organizations, the events and experiences can be costly on the benefits achieved.

Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM) refers to written, oral or electronic communication using people to people. The programs involve activities that relate to the experiences of consumers buying or using certain products or services (Kotler 2012, 37). This type of marketing is influential, personal and timely in the delivery of the information. In this communication tool, word of mouth is influential because people trust others they respect and know. In addition, word of mouth initiates a dialogue that reflects on experiences, opinions, and personal facts. Social media marketing is an example of word of mouth communication tool. The tools would include the organization's website, social networks or blog. In business-to-business markets, social media promotional programs are not expensive, but often not seen as important in B2C.

3. Cultural components and their impact on marketing activities

Various aspects of culture influence the marketing and promotional activities of organizations. According to Gillespie et al. (2004, 50), the aspects of culture include history, religion, education, and language. The scholars added that the aspects of culture are what shape and determine the communication and messages, whether direct and indirect, sent to the clients and customers regarding the choice of products. According to Hollensen (2011, 10), the perception of organizational culture has eight components that influence the promotional and marketing activities. The impact of each component in marketing activities is discussed.

3.1.1 Religion

The most common faiths in various countries in the world are Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism. Religion and faith can provide the basis for

similarities between different cultures because of the broadness of the aspect (Schnalke & Mason 2014, 9). Religion can influence the strategies undertaken by the marketing function of any organization operating in the B2B markets. Some aspects of religion such as spiritual celebrations differ across people of different faiths. For example, Christians will wear white clothes in marriage and black in funerals while Sikhs and Hindus will wear red on any spiritual occasion and white on cremation. Another instance of varying religious differences is the consumption lines. Eating habits within each religion are affected by spiritual prohibitions and necessities. In addition, the act of women publicizing differs across religions. Marketers and promoters in the business markets must examine faith and religion of their target market. The analysis is important because consumers will be more attracted to products that are promoted by linking the communication tools to the religion of the people

3.1.2 Technology

The progress of knowledge and technical abilities moves in the way of interlacing of the traditional ways of doing things. The marketing function of an organization should consider the technological progress of their target market. For example, black and white TVs were more marketable in the United States than in Europe because the U.S had lagged behind technologically. The technological culture defines the level of knowledge that exists in a certain population and marketers have to analyze that aspect before implementing any communication tools. The integrated marketing communication tools used must blend into the technological know-how of the target market. For instance, a marketer cannot use the internet as a marketing tool to a target market that has very limited internet access.

3.1.3 Language

The key to any country's culture is the language spoken by its nationals. For an organization whose activities are involved in international marketing, the marketers must learn the languages of the nations of whose market they are targeting (Kale 1991, 3). It is beneficial for any organization to learn different languages to assist it in the case on any growth strategies undertaken across the cultural borders. Promoters should communicate with the potential customer to influence their target market to purchase their products or subscribed to their services (Ablonczy-Mihályka 2009, 16). Language is a significant aspect of two people interacting. However, language can be divided into verbal and non-verbal elements. Verbal language has various roles in marketing function of B2B companies: evaluating efforts, gathering information, getting access to local communities, company-to-company communications and more importantly verbal language provides the abilities of

communication between parties. Non-verbal languages differ from regions to regions and from countries to countries. Customs and manners are some of the components of non-verbal languages. For marketers to effectively communicate with the target market, they have to learn both the verbal and non-verbal languages (McCort & Naresh 1993, 92).

3.1.4 Aesthetics

This component of culture includes the taste and preference of the people regarding music, art, drama and folklore (Gillespie et al. 2004, 53). Marketers and promoters in the B2B markets should learn the aesthetic preferences of their target market to understand the symbolic meanings of various expressions in artistry and contemporary artworks. Different cultures have different melodramatic tastes even in marketplaces that are comparable (Schnalke & Mason 2014, 12). For instance, the use of sex in advertising might be acceptable, attractive to one culture, and not acceptable in another. Thus for marketers to implement effective communication tools, they have to ensure proper examination of the aesthetic culture of the clients and consumers.

3.1.5 Values and Attitudes

Values and attitudes are elements of a society that help people contemplate what is suitable or right and differentiate it from what is unsuitable. The values and attitudes help people ponder what is desirable and vital in the society. These elements of culture are what grow into beliefs (McCort & Naresh 1993, 95). Marketers, especially in the international market, have to consider the values and attitudes of the potential clients and consumers before introducing a product or service to them. Successful B2B marketers consider and assess the values and beliefs of the staff of the firms they are targeting. It makes it easier to tailor a product that suits the needs of the corporate clients.

3.1.6 Cultural Norms

Norms are deduced from attitudes and values. Norms are the accepted, agreed or assumed set of standards of doing things. Most of the people in a society agree with the norms. Norms arise when a group of people, over a considerable period, agree and decide on what values are inappropriate and appropriate to their lives. The norms define what an outsider to the society must or must not do. They also describe what a local can do but an outsider cannot and what a local cannot do but an outsider can. Successful marketers in the B2B markets always consider the norms of their target market (Gillespie et al. 2004, 54). The consideration is conducted by careful research of the cultural norms and habits. The

marketing communication tools used by the marketers must be in line with what the clients consider as appropriate.

3.1.7 Education

Education includes the procedure and program of transferring thoughts, attitudes, knowledge, skills and training in special disciplines. The intentions of education are to transmit the traditions and norms to generations after generations. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through education (McCort & Naresh 1993, 97). For marketers in the B2B markets, a clear understanding of the education of their clients or potential customers is critical in that they can understand the exact product that is needed. In addition, the adoption of marketing communication systems must integrate the aspect of the level of education and skills of the target market. Thus, it is a necessity for promoters to use communication channels that are relevant to the level of education of the clients.

3.1.8 Communal Institutions

Institutions such as the government, businesses, classes or relations connected impact the actions of consumers and clients. These institutions also affect the methods involved with the customers in that they connect the clients and customers to each other. A successful marketing function in an organization takes into consideration the institutional connections of the target market. A full understanding of the communal institutions gives any organization a competitive advantage over others that want to explore that market (Gillespie et al. 2004, 56)

3.2 Intermediate Conclusion

Culture has a considerable impact on the marketing communication channels used by marketers and promoters (Schnalke & Mason 2014, 3). The decision as to which communication channel to be used in the B2B markets is one of the most significant decisions made by the marketing function of an organization. The diversification of culture across the population intensifies the rate of difficulty and uncertainty in formulating decisions for marketing communications. The communication channels to be used are framed after a deep and concise study of the cultural aspects of a particular group of people. Each group of customers has varying needs according to the traditions, customs, and income (Danaher & Rossiter 2011, 6). Marketers have to consider the different cultural values and needs of each of the groups before implementing any communication channel. The various cultural

components have a direct and indirect influence on the marketing channels to be used by a marketer.

Most relevant cultural components to concentrate on vary in different countries and also change during time. The rise of internet and technology in general has put emphasis on online advertising and social media communication. These are crucial channels to get in touch with the potential customer from different culture. A successful marketer in the B2B markets has to study the cultural demands of the target market before implementing any marketing communication channel (Rosenbloom & Trina 2003, 309). In addition to examining and analyzing the cultural needs of the target market, organizations need to analyze the marketing channels to be implemented for communication. Cultural knowledge should be seen as a whole, every single one of the listed components has impact on e.g. how people see the advertisements. Some components are more important within certain channels and some with others. For example, cultural norms and religion or more important in most of the printed media channels since the respondents are older on average.

4. Case Study

Case Study 1: Maersk Line

Maersk Line is a Danish company by having customers globally. It is the largest and biggest shipping business in the world. Its outreach is clients and customers of different countries and different cultures. During the years, Maersk Line Company has evolved as an organization that has pioneered the social media communication tool to achieve its objectives across transcultural platforms. The main objective of Maersk Line is to get closer to its potential and existing customers. The marketing function of the company developed and maintained strong client relationships using social media as a communication channel. The IT providers and business stakeholders within Maersk Line were frustrated by the lack of innovation within the company. The company faced high costs of communicating with their clients and potential clients. Maersk Line was confronted by significant problems, which included technical, structural, organizational and cultural. The cultural problems experienced by Maersk Line gave the company difficulties in delivering the change that was required by their clients.

According to Katona and Miklos (2014, 143), business market companies such as Maersk Line that utilize social media as a marketing communication channel usually have thought of the specific client groups to be influenced. Such organizations have acknowledged that business-to-business social media can humanize B2B markets, increase brand awareness, develop companies as leaders, connect with industry influencers, potential customers, and clients and has the potential to generate more revenue. Wichmann, the social media manager at Maersk in 2011, wanted to learn and discover more about the practices of social media. He studied the paths undertaken by GE and Dell closely. Wichmann, who was working in the communications department of Maersk, faced rejection from the internal employees of the company. The staff argued that Maersk Line was not sound for social media. Most of the employees received the thought of Maersk Line going to social media as a boring and unamusing. The organization culture of Maersk Line did not prefer social media as a proper communication tool (Wichmann 2013, n.p). The marketing function of the company was in preference of the mainstream communication tools such as print media. Wichmann had one objective, to develop and establish a social media strategy in the organization that would try to solve the problems faced by the company. The social media strategy emphasized on sales, internal usage, customer service and overall communication. The overall objective of the strategy was to get closer to their clients and potential customers. However, other objectives included gaining high staff involvement in the company's operations, to develop and create higher brand awareness and to get better coverage by the press. Wichmann developed a social media proposal to the top executives at Maersk Line. The objective of the proposal was to focus on customer insight as well as recruitment of followers. He focused on communication and construction of the company's presence on the platforms of social media. The social management team focused on customer service, internal usage, and external communications. In the first eleven months of using Facebook, Maersk had attracted more close to half a million of people on their page. Most of the "followers" were the employees of the company. Other followers included potential employees, suppliers, competitors, shipping enthusiasts and regulatory bodies among other fans. The company estimated that around 15 to 17 percent of the followers were their customers (Wichmann 2013, n.p). Today, Maersk Line has over one million followers on Facebook from all over the world. The success of the marketing communication tool used by the organization can be attributed to the willingness of the company to change their organizational culture and blend in with the target market and clients (Chui et al. 2013, 9).

Case Study 2: SAP PE Company

SAP PE is a German company that deals with inter-enterprise software and programs. The marketing function of the company did an analysis of the numbers of social media users and Latin America topped with 176 million social media users. The report revealed that social media users in Latin America spent more than 7 hours a day on social networks per month (Sap Se 2016, 6). In addition, the close of 70 percent of the internet users in Latin America engaged themselves with social media usage. Scholars noted that the increased numbers of social media and internet usage in Latin America originated from the culture of plazas. There are many plazas where people meet, share opinions and congregate to keep each other company. The abrupt growth of the digital world in Latin America has led to the overall growth of the internet and social media users. Thus, the Latin America culture is partly defined by the social media aspects in the region.

SAP PE noted the social media culture in Latin America and spotted a lucrative opportunity aimed at achieving the overall objectives of the company. The marketing team of SAP believed that the Latin America region had an added advantage over the other global regions in the world because it was relatively small. Thus, this region was perfect as the company would quickly and more easily implement their social media strategy and communicate the SAP's agenda. The company sent teams to different countries in the Latin America region to learn the challenges in the cultural differences. Different teams were faced with different challenges in different countries. SAP management made sure that the teams were sharing information and knowledge to each other, assisting each other in solving the challenges. The different challenges arise from different cultures of different countries. Social media communication works differently in different cultures. SAP was faced with the challenge of enabling the information through cross cultures to be efficiently shared by the company. SAP staff created social media accounts but did not run them as was expected by the company. The management decided to consolidate the accounts, which meant that company would shut down twenty-four social media accounts (Sap Se 2016, 22).

SAP PE is an international company, which operates in different regions of the world. Each region has its preference of the communication tool that is preferred. The marketing team at SAP noted that a social media platform is primarily used to promote and broadcast differs between regions. For instance, in the United States, Twitter is more preferred while in

the European region, the audience prefers LinkedIn. In addition, the team noted that some social media platforms like YouTube are blocked in some countries. The marketing team learned that language, a component of culture, is important in the Latin America region. They argued that instead of each country having its social media platform, they develop social media accounts by languages, which meant two accounts would be established: Portuguese social media accounts for Brazil and Spanish accounts for the other nations. The numbers of the social media accounts improved greatly. Brennan and Robin (2012, 101) have noted that for B2B markets companies to efficiently use social media as a marketing communication tool, they have first to understand that social media is a cultural aspect.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The idea of this thesis has been to examine the impact of cultural differences in business-to-business integrated marketing communication channels. Different business-to-business marketing communication channels have been listed and reviewed in terms of cultural relativity and two relationship based theories. In this conclusive chapter, I'm going to briefly answer the research questions and give some extra thoughts.

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Influence of cultural differences on suitable marketing actions

This thesis has crucial implications of culture on marketing strategies undertaken by organizations in the business markets. The perceived importance of the integration of cultural differences on suitable marketing strategies has been on the rise in the modern world (Yoo & Donthu 1998, 178). The integration is fuelled by new marketing communications such as social media that have enabled marketers to reach their clients across regional boundaries. Marketers in multinational companies such as Shell, IBM, AGCO and Oracle, spend most of their time in understanding the cross-cultural differences in their target markets across the national boundaries. For a marketing action to be suitable, effective marketers must realize how to develop and tailor a specific message to a specific culture. For instance, SAP PE Company tailored messages for the Latin America. In addition, the marketers must understand and evaluate when such cross-cultural messages are effective (Hollensen 2011, 13). This thesis suggests that integrated marketing communications that cut across cultures work effectively when they draw focused and concise attention.

5.1.2 Culturally relevant marketing channels in international B2B market

Culture is influential on the decisions made by marketing professionals. Advertising in the business markets is hugely affected by cultural differences (Cojocaru 2010, 56). The marketing function of an organization that involves in international marketing has to develop different advertising strategies for different countries or regions. For example, in the automobile industry, Mercedes-Benz establishes different advertising strategies in different regions. When developing advertisements, the Mercedes Benz Company takes cultural values and differences into deep consideration. For example, an automobile company cannot develop an advertisement of a woman driving a car in Saudi Arabia.

When doing personal selling to new markets, values, attitudes and cultural norms are extremely important aspects. Building relationships and trust is crucial in complicated and risky B2B selling situations. Small uncertainty or misunderstanding from the buyer from another culture can be crucial to the transaction. Marketer or seller should be aware of the customs and habits of the buyer's culture.

5.1.3 Overall impact of cultural differences in the B2B market

The decision-making units in a B2B market are very complex. The target audiences are amorphous as they are made of groups of individuals that are constantly changing and each one of them comes with different interests and motivation. Each individual brings with them different cultural and psychological baggage that will create interesting variations when it comes to the selection of methods and used marketing channels. In the study cases, this research found out that the cultural attributes are closely related with the marketing channel decisions developed by marketing teams. The marketing function should do an analysis and take into consideration of the preferred channel of communication in the international markets. The analysis should integrate the cultural values and perspective of preferences of the target market (Yoo & Donthu 1998, 179). A target market with various cultural backgrounds would call for the marketers to broaden the channels of communication used to adapt their messages. All marketing messages and communication channels should be tailored to a specific group after analysing and studying their culture (Anderson & Narus 1998, 54). Each target group has different cultural needs in terms of traditions, customs and income.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

After analyzing the aspects of culture that affect the marketing strategies undertaken by companies, it is evident that marketing teams within companies must consider and evaluate culture. Marketing teams should examine the different groups of people that make their target market. In addition, the communication channels used by the promoters should consider the cultural components of the target group. Future studies should consider the impact of social-economic aspects of a group and its influence on the marketing channels used. The challenges faced in cultural research are the availability of information and data because of the diversified cultures. For instance, people living in the same locality have diversified culture too. Individuals in the same geographical location may have different customs, religious views, and customs among other cultural aspects. Marketers should not judge a group because it comes from a particular geographic area.

This thesis is just a scratch on the surface with introducing main aspects of B2B and cultural components with the integrated marketing communication channels. The topic of cultural aspects in B2B marketing decisions is wide and open to further research. Each of the cultural component and their integrity to the B2B marketing could be sufficient area of research itself.

From this thesis on the impact of culture on marketing strategies, it implies that for managers wishing to do business in international markets should develop and integrate separate marketing strategies in different countries. For businesses operating in the B2B markets, it is necessary for the marketing executives to build networks in the target market economies for easier analysis of the culture. The networks help in the identification of the real consumer needs and also in the development of strategies to overcome the cultural barriers in the target markets.

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